(including FISA) on the president's powers during the time that he served in the Ford White House and as a minority member of a Democratic Congress. Despite rumors of a decline in his standing with Bush, Cheney remains the most powerful vice-president in American history, with an octopus-like reach into many parts of the government. He has placed his own people in each of the national security agencies—the Departments of Defense and State as well as the CIA and the National Security Council. (Until she recently took a maternity leave, his daughter Elizabeth was principal deputy assistant secretary of state for the Near East, a position that does not require Senate confirmation and from which people on Capitol Hill saw her as effectively in charge of the State Department's Middle East bureau.) Cheney installed Porter Goss in the CIA, with orders to root out people who leaked information inconvenient to the administration. It's difficult, however, to know much about what Cheney is doing because his office operates in such secrecy that a reporter friend of mine refers to it as a ''black hole.''

In Bush, Cheney has had a very receptive listener. Bush's own overweening attitude toward the presidency is clear from his behavior. He bristles at being challenged. He told Bob Woodward, ''I do not need to explain why I say things. That's the interesting thing about being the president. Maybe somebody needs to explain to me why they say something, but I don't feel I owe anybody an explanation.'' His comment, ''I'm the decider,'' about not firing Rumsfeld, is in fact a phrase he has used often.

Why have the members of Congress been so timorous in the face of the steady encroachment on their constitutional power by the executive branch? Conversations with many people in or close to Congress produced several reasons. Most members of Congress don't think in broad constitutional terms; their chief preoccupations are raising money and getting reelected. Their conversations with their constituents are about the more practical issues on voters' minds: the prices of gasoline, prescription drugs, and college tuition. Or about voters' increasing discontent with the Iraq war.

Republicans know that the President's deepening unpopularity might hurt them in the autumn elections; but, they point out, he's still a good fund-raiser and they need his help. Moreover, the Republicans are more hierarchical than the Democrats, more reverential toward their own party's president; it's unimaginable that Republicans would be as openly critical of Bush as the Democrats were of Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton. Republicans are more disciplined about delivering their party's ''talking points'' to the public. Republican fund-raising is done more from the top than is the case with Democrats, and there's always the implicit threat that if a Republican isn't loyal to the president, the flow of money to their campaigns might be cut off. A Republican opponent can challenge an incumbent in a primary, in which not many people vote. Here Arlen Specter has shown unusual courage. He barely survived a conservative challenge in the primary election in 2004 (though Bush supported him), and then had to beat back a conservative attempt to remove him as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee because of his views in favor of abortion rights. He survived by promising not to let his pro-choice views hold up the judicial nominations before the committee. Specter told me, ''What I worry about most is the restrictions of Congress's constitutional authority, which the Congress doesn't resist.''

Bush's declining popularity can occasionally impel Republicans to try to seem independent of him—as, say, on the issue of Dubai being awarded a contract to administer U.S. ports; after all the administration's talk about security, this arrangement sounded outrageous in the American heartland, and members of Congress rushed to kill it. But the Republican legislators have also become convinced, in the words of one Republican senator, ''We've got to hang with the president because if you start splitting with him or say the president has been abusing power we'll all go down.'' Karl Rove has recently been arguing along these lines to congressional Republicans. In the end, a Republican lobbyist told me, Republican politicians feel that Bush is ''still their guy.'' The fierce partisanship on Capitol Hill also blocks serious discussion of the issue of unlimited executive power: many Republicans have concluded that the Democrats are exploiting such issues for partisan purposes and have dug in against them. On May 11, at a regular weekly luncheon of about twenty conservative senators, Senator Roberts denounced criticism of Bush's surveillance and data-collecting programs as ''dangerous'' and ''insulting'' to the President and charged the Democrats with treating national security as a political issue. Members of Congress who are protective of their institution and capable of looking beyond their parochial concerns—and who might have objected to Bush's encroachments on the legislative branch—are largely gone.

From the time of the vote on the Iraq war, many Democrats have been reluctant to be caught on the ''wrong side'' of ''national security'' issues, even those blatantly cooked up by the White House. It usually requires a strong public reaction, as there was on the subject of torture, for Congress to make a move against the President's actions. A Republican senator told me, ''There's a feeling on the Hill that the public doesn't care about it, that it's willing to give up liberties in order to defeat the terrorists.'' Some of the proposals offered on Capitol Hill for regulating the NSA wiretaps amount to little regulation at all.

At the center of the current conflict over the Constitution is a president who surrounds himself with proven loyalists, who is not interested in complexities, and who is averse to debate and intolerant of dissenters within his administration and elsewhere. (A prominent Washington Republican who had raised a lot of money for Bush was dropped from the Christmas party list after he said something mildly critical of the President.) A Republican lobbyist close to the White House described to me what he called the Cult of Bush: ''This group is all about loyalty and the definition of loyalty extends to policy-making, politics, and to the execution of policy—and to the regulatory agencies.'' The result, this man said, is that the people in the agencies, including the regulatory agencies, ''become robotrons and just do what they're told. There's no dialogue.''

The President's recent political weakness hasn't caused the White House to back away from its claims of extraordinary presidential power. The Republican lobbyist Vin Weber says, ''I think they're keenly aware of the fact that they're politically weakened, but that's not the same thing as the institution of the presidency being damaged.'' People with very disparate political views, such as Grover Norquist and Dianne Feinstein, worry about the long-term implications of Bush's power grab. Norquist said, ''These are all the powers that you don't want Hillary Clinton to have.'' Feinstein says, ''I think it's very dangerous because other presidents will come along and this sets a precedent for them.'' Therefore, she says, ''it's very important that Congress grapple with and make decisions about what our policies should be on torture, rendition, detainees, and wiretapping lest Bush's claimed right to set the policies, or his policies themselves, become a precedent for future presidents.''

James Madison wrote in Federalist Paper No. 47: ''The accumulation of all powers legislative, executive and judiciary in the same hands, whether of one, a few or many . . . may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny.''

That extraordinary powers have, under Bush, been accumulated in the ''same hands'' is now undeniable. For the first time in more than thirty years, and to a greater extent than even then, our constitutional form of government is in jeopardy.

TRIBUTE TO LIZ COVENTRY

HON. SCOTT GARRETT

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 29, 2006

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, it is with a great sense of pride and with an overwhelming sense of sadness that I rise today to pay tribute to the lifelong career of public service of Liz Coventry.

Liz has been a loyal supporter, advisor, friend, and confidante for nearly a decade. Throughout my years in the New Jersey State Legislature and my tenure in Congress, Liz has been an integral part of the team that I depend upon and my constituents look to for assistance and guidance. There is no job too big for Liz's breadth of expertise and knowledge—she can accomplish any task before her. And, there is no job too small for Liz—she is a true team player, pitching in whenever she can and wherever she is needed.

In her capacity on my Congressional staff, Liz has been a great help to countless constituents. She truly takes each individual case to heart. No one who sits with Liz at her desk ever feels like a case number; she gives each person a real personal touch.

Liz has also been organizing a number of special projects for Fifth District residents, such as the art competition and a veterans history project. Her dedication to the art competition is worthy of the art patronage of the Medici Family during the Renaissance. She makes everyone of these young artists feel like Michelangelo or DaVinci. And, her commitment to the veterans history project is unparalleled. She is a one-woman USO, making every veteran she speaks with feel like the marines at Iwo Jima.

Liz has recently decided to take a well-deserved retirement after years in selfless public service. I know that my whole staff, my constituents, and I will miss her dearly, but we wish her the very best as she takes this grand step.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO RUEDY EDGINGTON

HON. JON C. PORTER

OF NEVADA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 29, 2006

Mr. PORTER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Mr. Ruedy Edgington as he leaves the Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT).

Ruedy has been at the NDOT for 26 years. He has accepted a position as Parson Transportation Group's Area Manager. In his new